

COGNITIVE CONSEQUENCES OF FORCED NONCOMPLIANCE¹

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An experiment was conducted to test the hypothesis that the greater the inducement offered for performing a counterattitudinal task, the greater the dissonance—if the individuals choose not to comply with the attitude-discrepant request. It was predicted that dissonance aroused by noncompliance would be reduced by a strengthening of the original attitude. Experimental subjects were offered either a high or a low incentive for writing an essay advocating the use of codes of dress in secondary schools. The situation was devised in such a way that all of the subjects chose not to write the essay. The results indicated that high incentive subjects became more strongly opposed to dress code regulations than either the low incentive group or a control group.

Since Festinger's (1957) presentation of dissonance theory, considerable attention has been given to the proposal that counterattitudinal behavior can lead to attitude change. Such attitude change, according to the theory, represents an attempt on the part of the individual to reduce the inconsistency or dissonance among his cognitions. In 1959, Festinger and Carlsmith demonstrated that the amount of attitude change that results from counterattitudinal behavior is inversely related to the amount of inducement offered for that behavior. They reasoned that a large inducement for acting in a manner discrepant with one's attitudes helps reduce dissonance by justifying the behavior. A minimal inducement, however, does not justify counterattitudinal behavior. In this situation, dissonance may be reduced by altering the initial attitudes so that they are consistent with the behavior.

In typical "forced compliance" settings, such as that of Festinger and Carlsmith, subjects are given the perception of having a free choice about performing a counterattitudinal task. In fact, however, almost all comply with the experimenter's request and

act in a way that is inconsistent with their initial attitudes. But what if the subject chooses not to comply with the experimenter's request? What effect would such choice behavior have on dissonance arousal and the subject's attitudes?

Consider an individual who is offered an incentive to make a speech advocating political censorship of the news media. When offered a choice, however, this individual declines to make the attitude discrepant speech, despite the monetary reward. According to dissonance theory, the act of declining should produce attitude change in the subject as a *direct* function of the amount of incentive that had been offered. And the direction of attitude change should be *away* from the position that would have been advocated in the speech.

This prediction can be clearly derived from Festinger's theory. Rejecting the alternative of making the pro-censorship speech includes a rejection of the reward that would have been earned had the subject consented to make the speech. The inconsistency between desiring a monetary reward and rejecting an opportunity to earn one should produce dissonance. The greater the rejected reward, the greater the magnitude of the dissonance. One way to reduce dissonance is for the subject to increase the salience of his consistent cognitions. In the above illustration, the subject could change his attitude so that he is even more strongly against political censorship

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than he was before. This would provide a stronger element of consistency among the individual's cognitions and help to justify his decision to turn down the experimenter's request. Of course, as the rejected reward becomes minimal, less dissonance is aroused, and there is less need for attitude change.

The issue of what we may call forced non-compliance has received relatively little attention in the literature. Mills (1958) devised a situation in which students could choose whether or not they would succumb to the temptation of cheating on an examination. Attitudes toward cheating were measured prior to and following their decisions, and it was found that students who had resisted the temptation to cheat became more severe in their attitudes against cheating. Similarly, Zimbardo, Weisenberg, Firestone, and Levy (1965) urged their subjects to eat a food that they did not wish to eat. It was found that subjects who refused to comply with the experimenter's request rated the unwanted food more negatively than subjects who complied with the request.

The experiments by Mills (1958) and Zimbardo et al. (1965) were concerned with systematically varying the degree of incentive that was coincident with the rejected behavior. Neither investigation, however, was concerned with establishing a situation in which all subjects would opt to reject to earn a reward for counterattitudinal behavior. In both the Mills and Zimbardo et al. experiments, the subjects were allowed to self-select their own experimental condition, and less than half of the subjects chose to reject the attitude-discrepant behavior.

The present experiment, then, is an attempt to establish the mirror image of the typical forced compliance experiment. It was designed to assess the cognitive consequences of forced noncompliance under several degrees of incentive magnitude offered for inducement. We predicted that the greater the inducement the subjects resist by refusing to engage in attitude-discrepant behavior, the more extreme their original attitudes will become.

METHOD

Overview

The design required that the subjects refuse to comply with a request. Thus, it was necessary to minimize the factors that usually operate to make most subjects cooperate with their experimenter's requests. This was accomplished in several ways: The task, writing an essay in favor of high school dress codes, was one that most college students would not want to do; the person making the request attempted to minimize his authority role and seemed somewhat indifferent as to whether or not the subject complied; and the physical setting was shabby and uncomfortable with none of the usual scientific trappings. The subjects were told, moreover, that their essays would appear in an official publication that would be used in an actual persuasion program and that their authorship would be publicly acknowledged. Furthermore, the alternative to performing the task was made relatively attractive. It was hoped that these efforts would yield noncompliance so that the major independent variable, the amount of incentive offered for performing the task, could be studied. The dependent variable, assessed by a questionnaire, was the subject's final attitude toward the dress code issue after he had refused to write the essay.

Subjects

Thirty-six freshmen from Princeton University volunteered for a study advertised as "freshmen adjustment to Princeton." They were offered \$1 for $\frac{1}{2}$ hour of their time. Subjects were run individually.

*Procedure*³

When the subject arrived at the scheduled time, he was ushered into an attractive waiting room which contained a television set and several recent magazines. After a few moments, the subject was greeted by an attractive young woman who served as the first experimenter. She explained that she was running slightly behind schedule and that there would be a few minutes delay. She asked the subject to wait and returned to her office. Within seconds she returned and said:

There is something you could do while you are waiting. There is a student down the hall who is conducting some kind of study. I saw him a few minutes ago, and he said that he could use some extra students to serve as subjects. I don't know exactly what he is doing, but I gather that he has some funds available to pay people. Anyway, why don't you go down there and see what he has to say? If you decide to participate in his experiment, just come back here when you are

³ We are grateful to Barbara Cooper and Charles J. Scalise for their skillful portrayal of the first and second experimenters.

finished. If you decide you do not want to participate, you can come back to this waiting room and watch TV while you are waiting for me.

Every subject agreed to go down the hall to see what the other experiment was about.

When the subject arrived at the very small, poorly lighted room that served as the second experimenter's office, he found the experimenter engrossed in a reading assignment. The second experimenter reluctantly looked up from his reading and introduced himself as a student who was running an experiment for an outside agency and the psychology department. In a very detached manner, the experimenter explained the purpose of his experiment:

The Ocean County, New Jersey, Parents Association has done several favors for the University in the past, so the psychology department has agreed to do a favor for them. It seems that the Ocean County Parents Association desires to distribute a booklet for all of their students advocating the importance and necessity of dress codes for students. They believe that the attitudes and opinions of college students have great influence on the attitudes of high school students. Therefore, they asked us to solicit college students to write an 800-1,000 word essay on the following topic: "High schools should legislate and enforce codes of proper dress for students." If you decide to write this essay, they want the strongest, most forceful essay possible supporting that view.

In the *high-incentive* condition, the experimenter then said, "The Parents Association apparently has a little money available, and they are going to pay \$1.50 for a thoughtful, forceful, and serious essay."

In the *low-incentive* condition, the sum of \$.50 was substituted in the above sentence.

In both conditions, the experimenter continued:

Let me remind you again that we are not sponsoring this project. All the psychology department and the University have agreed to do is to ask students if they would like to write the essay. Then, whether you decide to write the essay or not our obligation is fulfilled. If you decide to write the essay, I will give you this booklet in which to write it. I should also inform you that you will have to sign your name to the essay, and it is going to be printed in the booklet published by the Parents Association. Remember, you are under no obligation to participate in this project. If you'd rather not, that will be fine. If you would like to write it, you can sit down now and do it here. Otherwise, thank you very much for coming.

For college students the adoption of dress codes was found to be an attitude-discrepant position. The issue was chosen since, for a separate sample of subjects, a vast majority indicated their opposition to any form of dress regulation. In the present

study, every subject chose not to write the pro-dress-code essay.

When the subject returned to the office of the first experimenter, he was given a questionnaire to complete. At this point, the first experimenter was unaware of the particular incentive condition under which any given experimental subject was being run.

The subject was told that the questionnaire was one of several surveys in the freshmen adjustment study. It consisted of 50 attitude items of current local and national interest. Included in the survey was the item, "Secondary schools should legislate and enforce codes of proper dress for students." This item, like the others, was followed by a 31-point scale labeled "strongly agree" and "strongly disagree" at the end points. Following the attitude statement, the subject was asked, "How confident are you of this opinion?" and was given a 5-point Likert scale for his response.

In the *control* condition, the subjects came to the first experimenter's waiting room and were told that there would be a few minute delay. After a few moments, the experimenter ushered the subject into the office and administered the dependent measure in the same manner that she had done for the experimental subjects.

When the subjects in all conditions had completed their questionnaires, the first experimenter explained that the study was completed. She proceeded to completely explain the purpose of the experiment and to discuss the reasons for the deceptions involved.

RESULTS

The data from six subjects were disregarded in the statistical analyses. One subject had difficulty with the English language, while four subjects misread the instructions on the dependent measure. Each of the latter four subjects circled one of the two labels that defined the end points of the attitude scales rather than any of the 31 points on the scales themselves. In addition, one subject had been dropped from his high school due to his disregarding his school's dress codes: His experience with the issue (which resulted in an important court decision) was deemed too discrepant with the other students' exposure to the issue, and his data were not used in the analyses.

The major dependent measure was the subject's response to the statement, "Secondary schools should legislate and enforce codes of proper dress for students." It was predicted that the subjects in the high-incentive condition who refused to write the pro-dress-code essay would become more opposed to the imposition of dress codes than

TABLE 1
SUBJECTS' MEAN ATTITUDES TOWARD
DRESS CODE REGULATIONS

Control	Low incentive	High incentive
9.7 ^a	10.0	3.1

Summary of the analysis of variance			
Source of variation	df	MS	F
Treatment	2	33.8	3.67*
Error	27	9.2	

Note.— $n = 10$ in all three conditions.

^a Higher numbers indicate greater agreement with dress code regulations.

* $p < .05$.

the subjects in the low-incentive or control conditions.

The results are presented in Table 1. The overall analysis of variance indicated that there were significant differences among the sample means ($F = 3.67$, $df = 1/27$, $p < .05$). Planned comparisons were performed on the data to assess the specific hypothesis of the experiment. The subjects in the high-incentive condition were more strongly opposed to dress code regulations than the subjects in the control condition ($F = 23.7$, $df = 1/27$, $p < .01$). They were also more strongly opposed than subjects in the low-incentive condition ($F = 25.9$, $df = 1/27$, $p < .01$). The subjects in the low-incentive condition, on the other hand, did not differ from the control condition with regard to their opinion on dress code regulations.

The second dependent measure that was examined in the experiment was the subjects' confidence in their opinions regarding dress codes. It was thought that one way to resolve the dissonance caused by rejecting an incentive to write a counterattitudinal essay was to become more confident in one's anti-dress-code opinion. The means for the control, low-incentive, and high-incentive conditions are 1.5, 1.6, and 1.1, respectively, with lower numbers indicating greater confidence. All subjects were so close to the ceiling on the 5-point scale that the scores were not significantly different in a one-way analysis of variance.

If the scores on the confidence measure are examined with regard to the number of sub-

jects who felt that they were "extremely confident" versus the number of subjects who experienced a lesser degree of confidence, the pattern of results reported in Table 2 emerges. Since the expected frequencies of several of the cells were small, a chi-square analysis was performed on the differences between the high-incentive and the combined data of the low-incentive and control groups. As expected, the subjects in the high-incentive condition were more confident than the subjects in the other two conditions ($\chi^2 = 3.03$, $p < .08$). The product moment correlation of the subjects' confidence and attitude scores revealed a significant association ($r = .64$, $p < .05$), indicating that the subjects who became more extreme in their initial beliefs also tended to be more confident about their position.

The results of the present study, then, indicate that the greater the rewards that subjects forego by refusing to perform an attitude-discrepant behavior, the more extreme their original attitudes will become and the greater will be the confidence with which they hold those attitudes.

DISCUSSION

Before considering some of the implications of these findings, let us note a surprising aspect of the present investigation: Not one of the subjects agreed to write the attitude-discrepant essay. Yet, several previous investigators (e.g., Cohen, 1962; Linder, Cooper, & Jones, 1967) have found the low degree of incentive magnitude used in this study to be sufficient to yield almost total compliance with a counterattitudinal request. In our experiment, however, the promised reward of \$1.50 was not enough to convince subjects to write the dress code essay.

While in some instances, differences in the content of the attitude issue could produce differences in the degree of incentive necessary to produce compliance, such an explanation is not likely to account for the total lack of compliance in the present investigation. It is highly improbable that writing essays favoring dress codes in secondary schools is more of a noxious task than convincing naive students to use marijuana (Nel, Helmreich, & Aronson, 1969), urging a university to ban its football team from the Rose Bowl (Rosen-

berg, 1965), or supporting a ban against controversial speakers at a university (Linder et al., 1967).

It is more likely that the difference in compliance rates between the present investigation and the typical forced-compliance experiment is due to the elimination of the usual demand characteristics that are present when an experimenter "asks" subjects if they wish to perform the attitude-discrepant tasks. Kelley (1967) has noted that the typical forced compliance experiment employs considerably more pressure than simple financial incentives in order to convince people to comply. Rather, it is usually the combination of demand characteristics plus financial inducement that yields compliance in the typical experiment.

In the present investigation, the usual demand characteristics were minimized in several ways. The experimenter made no special plea to the subject to write his counterattitudinal essay. Instead, he made it clear that he was not personally involved in the project and did not really care whether the subject wrote the essay or not. Writing the essay would not help the experimenter or the university, but rather some groups of parents more than a hundred miles away. These parents, in turn, were planning to publish the subjects' essays, with the authorship acknowledged, as part of a public campaign to persuade high school students to accept dress codes. By writing the essays, then, the subjects would be supporting a group and a set of values that many college students do not generally support, at least publicly. Moreover, the alternative to complying was not unpleasant. The subject could relax in an attractive waiting room with magazines and a television set. Without the subtle clues that accompany the usual request to perform a counterattitudinal task, the incentive levels in the present investigation were apparently not quite sufficient to induce compliance.

Clearly, the data demonstrate the consequences of rewards that do not yield compliance. They indicate that there are two major effects when the offered rewards do not lead to compliance. First, attitude change is a direct rather than an inverse function of the

TABLE 2
NUMBER OF SUBJECTS EXPRESSING EXTREME
CONFIDENCE IN THEIR OPINION

Condition	Extreme confidence	Lesser confidence ^a
Control	6	4
Low incentive	4	6
High incentive	9	1

^a Represents any of the choices on Likert-scale other than "extreme."

amount of reward; and second, the attitude change that occurs is a strengthening of the original attitude rather than the adoption of a new one. It follows that whenever attempts are made to persuade people to behave in a counterattitudinal manner, very different consequences will occur depending on whether or not compliance is obtained. This has important ramifications for any attempt to use forced compliance techniques when coping with social problems.

In the past, forced compliance approaches have been suggested for such areas as therapy with mentally ill patients (Goldstein, Heller, & Sechrest, 1966) and desegregation (Brehm & Cohen, 1962). The results of our study suggest that there is an implicit danger in applying the dissonance forced compliance paradigm to social problems. People who are induced by sufficient pressure to behave in an attitude-discrepant way come to change their attitudes in a way that those applying the pressure find desirable; but people who are subjected to *insufficient* pressures change their attitudes in a direction opposite to that intended by those applying the pressures. Insofar as attitudes are held with varying degrees of strength by different people, the inducements that will be just sufficient to produce attitude-discrepant behavior will also differ. Any pressure that is sufficient to produce compliance in some people can be counted on to be insufficient for others and, thus, will harden the resistance of the most committed minority.

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